School Pantries Feeding Families All Year Long

Many of us dream of having a home on the edge of the mountain, overlooking a quiet valley, but what if yours is a tiny home hidden high in the woods? Your “town” only has one street, two small stores, a few churches and a school. Welcome to Clairfield, Tennessee — population 1,100 — where less than half have a high school diploma, 20% are unemployed and over a third live below the poverty level. When it rains hard, the roads wash out, and people can’t come or leave.

Now, imagine being a child suffering from malnutrition. School becomes a blur because you can’t concentrate, and you’re too weak to play with the other kids. Poverty is casting its shadow over another generation, and the cycle continues.

Leaders in Clairfield decided something had to be done to break the cycle. They contacted Second Harvest and asked for help. With the help of Knoxville Fellows, we turned an empty modular school room into a life-saving School Pantry.

Kristie Hopwood, our School Pantry Program Coordinator, said “The kids’ eyes were huge when the first truck of food arrived.” One boy was so hungry he asked, “When can we get some of that food?” Anxious to be fed, the students helped unload and stock the pantry’s shelves full of nutritious groceries. “The kids were so excited. They looked at the truck like Santa’s sleigh,” Hopwood explained.

What started in Cocke County three years ago, has spread to other poverty-stricken, rural counties like Claiborne County. “Our goal is to have at least one School Pantry in all 18 counties we serve,” Hopwood said. “We are in nine counties now, with the tenth coming very soon.”

In the past year, you’ve helped send 101,793 pounds of food to School Pantries feeding:

- 2,445 families
- 3,399 children
- 8,029 people

Your gifts are not just helping to feed people. You’re changing isolated communities as well. Since our School Pantries run all year long, they create a positive atmosphere in areas that have been stricken with hopelessness. Parents are more comfortable communicating with teachers. Children are lifted up and given a chance to break generational poverty. Thank you for caring enough to change the future of the next generation.
It was like a perfect storm that hit Scotty and his daughter, turning their lives upside down. A close family member dies, his marriage collapses, and he loses his job. Almost everything was gone. “It was just me and my daughter, and we became homeless,” Scotty said.

Like many parents that lose their jobs and home, desperation becomes a way of life. “So, when you’re in this situation, you get overwhelmed and don’t know what to do,” Scotty said. “Me and my daughter, we lived in a tent during the summertime,” Scotty explained. Then they moved into a friend’s old trailer — at no cost, while he was fixing it up. “That was a real blessing,” he said.

With limited resources, Scotty and his daughter didn’t have much to eat. When they did have food, he said, “We would eat stuff like noodles, cereal — things that we didn’t have to worry about going bad.”

“Then I lost my job again, and they cut the power off,” he said. Soon after, Child Protection Services took Scotty’s daughter from him. “That’s when I lost it in my head, because she was my world. That’s when I started using drugs and got in trouble,” he explained.

With nothing left, Scotty turned to Step House, a refuge for those struggling from addiction and homelessness. As a pantry partner, Step House has been able to provide Scotty with the nutritious food he’s needed to recover and get his life back in order. “It’s a joy to not have to worry about food,” he said, and the joy continues. Scotty’s daughter is “Living with a good Christian family from her school, and she’s doing good,” he said. “I talk to her numerous times every day.”

“Remember the long days of summer when you were a child? Endless hours of playing with friends, swimming, vacations, trips to the zoo and sleeping late. For hundreds of children in our region, they don’t want school to end. It’s not because they especially like to study math, science, English or any other subject. Rather, when school is out, fear, anxiety, and desperation without food begins. Their summer days are long, because their homes lack the food they need to eat every day. During the school year, they have access to breakfast, lunch and other programs, but those programs go away during the summer.

Our rural areas are the most difficult to keep up with because they’re so hard to reach. These areas are food deserts, where families don’t have access to food, including food pantries, to help them through rough times. I’m sad to say it, but we have to accept the fact that some children just won’t be able to eat. Child hunger perpetuates a whole cycle of growing up without a solid foundation and jeopardizes the future of our next generation.

I’m so excited about our School Pantry Program that runs all year long. It’s a revolution for reaching pockets of hunger where families can finally go to a food pantry, where before there was none. Schools provide the room to store food, and volunteers help distribute it in their tiny communities. Food not only feeds a family, it provides stability in the home. Thanks to you, what started in 2016 in one school, has now grown to nine schools.

Your passion to help us defeat hunger is bringing security and hope in communities that have been ravaged by the opioid crisis and the vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, and despair. Thank you for standing with us. You’re making a difference, and I can’t thank you enough.

Sincerely,

Elaine Streno
Executive Director
For more than 25 years, Rita worked for a veterinarian managing the office. Families loved Rita for her sweet personality and caring ability to help them with their beloved pets. Everything appeared to be going well, then she stumbled, and stumbled again and again. Rita was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Soon after, she had a stroke. “Now, I walk very carefully,” Rita says.

Because of her disability she had to retire, and her whole life changed forever. Living alone and unable to work or drive is tough enough, but depending on Social Security for her income makes life an even greater struggle. “I barely get $700 a month,” Rita says. That’s supposed to cover all her bills, medicine and food.

With a limited income, Rita is constantly having to choose between food and paying her bills, especially her medication. “I have to have my medicine, because I had a stroke. Otherwise, I’ll have another one and I don’t want that,” she explains. When asked if she ever misses any meals, Rita simply says, “I don’t eat three meals a day.” That’s not what she wants, but she has no choice.

Because of your generosity, Rita is able to get much needed food from The Lord’s Child, one of our valued food pantry partners. “I come here every two weeks,” Rita says. “I depend on it a whole lot.” Without the Lord’s Child, she would be missing many more meals every week.

To Second Harvest donors, Rita says, “Thank you! I wouldn’t eat if you didn’t give. I have to have help, that’s why I’m here.” Thank you for making a difference where it really counts — helping the disabled, aged, and those struggling in poverty.

MS Changed Her Life

“"I don't eat three meals a day."
- RITA

Save the Date

Benefitting Second Harvest Food Bank, the 2019 Music Feeds concert series, presented by Commercial Bank, includes six amazing shows at the Tennessee Amphitheater World’s Fair Park from June through October:

- Saturday, June 1: Here Come the Mummies (back by popular demand!)
- Friday, July 19: Simply Queen (Queen tribute band)
- Saturday, July 20: Corey Smith (a Knoxville favorite!)
- Saturday, Aug. 3: Shining Star (Earth, Wind & Fire tribute band)
- Friday, Aug. 30: Steve Earle & the Dukes
- Friday, Oct. 4: Scott Miller & the Commonwealth

Tickets are on sale NOW at: knoxvilletickets.com/musicfeeds.

SECOND HARVEST WOULD LIKE TO GIVE A SPECIAL THANKS TO:
“We stop the bleeding,” says Katie McIlwain of Manna House. “We’re offering help for a lot of families that would have kids going hungry or seniors that are not going to make it with their limited income.”

Manna House is an outreach of Cokesbury United Methodist Church and a valued pantry partner. “We love Second Harvest, we couldn’t do what we do without them. We serve about 700 families each month — that’s a lot of food. There’s just no way we could afford that at market rate,” McIlwain explains.

We could not reach the thousands of people in our 18-county area without the help of more than 550 partner agencies, like Manna House, who are dedicated to feeding the hungry. The value of our partnerships and your generosity is remarkable. Thanks for standing with us.

Support Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee and you support more than 550 local nonprofits and programs.

www.secondharvestetn.org